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Commitment to Secondary Diamond Industry

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak today about diamonds and our local cut and polish industry. I spoke numerous times about the Government of the Northwest Territories' inability or lack of desire to pursue new directions and a commitment to the secondary diamond industry here in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, Laurelton diamond factory closed its doors and with it 40 jobs were eliminated. I have constituents with young families who worked at Laurelton who have come to me and said could this have been avoided? Where was the Government of the Northwest Territories when it came to protecting the jobs at Laurelton and the cut and polish industry?

Mr. Speaker, an industry that we have worked so hard to establish is being left to die on its own and my belief is that it's not too late. The Government of the Northwest Territories must look at ways to be flexible and accommodating during these rough economic times. We need to sit down with the existing cut and polish factories and find some creative ways to keep their doors open and retain the 65 jobs that remain in these factories. What good is a new diamond policy going to be if we don't have any factories left?

The Arslanian and polar bear factories are shut down all of this week and already five employees have been laid off. The factories are closed so that management can come up with a plan as to how to survive in this worldwide recession and their plan may be to close the factories for good. This would be an outright shame.

I believe the Government of the Northwest Territories should be trying to sort out some interim rules or policy to allow the remaining factories to function. According to industry experts, the turnaround in the diamond industry will not happen until the last quarter of 2010. The next two years will be extremely difficult for existing cut and polish factories. We need to ensure that we do everything in our power to help these factories and the cut and polish industry survive until the market turns around.

Do we not care about the remaining 65 jobs and families involved? Can't we show this industry and the diamond world that we actually care about the cut and polish industry here in the Northwest Territories? I will have questions for the Minister of ITI at the appropriate time.